

Tolstoy, Nietzsche of Russia

A New Life of the Great Slav Whose Teachings Are
So Largely Responsible for the Spirit of Russia To-day

IF there is just ground for laying something of the militaristic excesses of modern Germany to the account of Friedrich Nietzsche, how much more is the teaching of Leo Tolstoy responsible for the spirit of Russia during the last few months!

Whatever some Russians may think of Tolstoy's literary achievements, he was the greatest Russian figure of the last century; he was also in all likelihood the most widely read author of modern times. His ideas penetrated into the remote districts of his own country and were familiar to illiterate peasants, to whom Turgenev and Dostoevsky were not even names. Though his art and his ideas were distinct products of his country, Tolstoy was known throughout the world, and his doctrine of non-resistance was the greatest single factor in the worldwide movement toward universal peace. But unlike many theorists and teachers, Tolstoy strove to live up to his ideals.

Kerensky a Tolstoyan.

When about a year ago the revolution finally accomplished its purpose of dethroning the royal family, the young man who took the reins of Government into his hands was a Tolstoyan. Kerensky's refusal, for instance, to execute enemies of the state was the first step toward a practical working out of Tolstoy's doctrines. Possibly Kerensky was unaware that he was applying Tolstoy's commandment, "Do not reply to violence by violence; if they strike you, endure it"; perhaps he thought he was acting upon principles of his own. Perhaps, but the spirit of Tolstoy was in the air: the essentially anarchistic, individualistic ethics of the great teacher had become an integral part of Russian thought; and Kerensky's attempt to put them into practice was on the whole acceptable to his supporters.

The causes of Kerensky's overthrow need not here be entered into, but it may be noted that when Bolshevism became an established fact Tolstoy's latest and most highly developed code of ethics formed the basis of its activities. The most important sections in the brief series of commandments set forth in *My Religion* are:

"Be not angry. Live in peace with all men; never regard your anger at men as just.

"Swear not at all. Never take oath to any man in any matter. Every oath is required from men for evil.

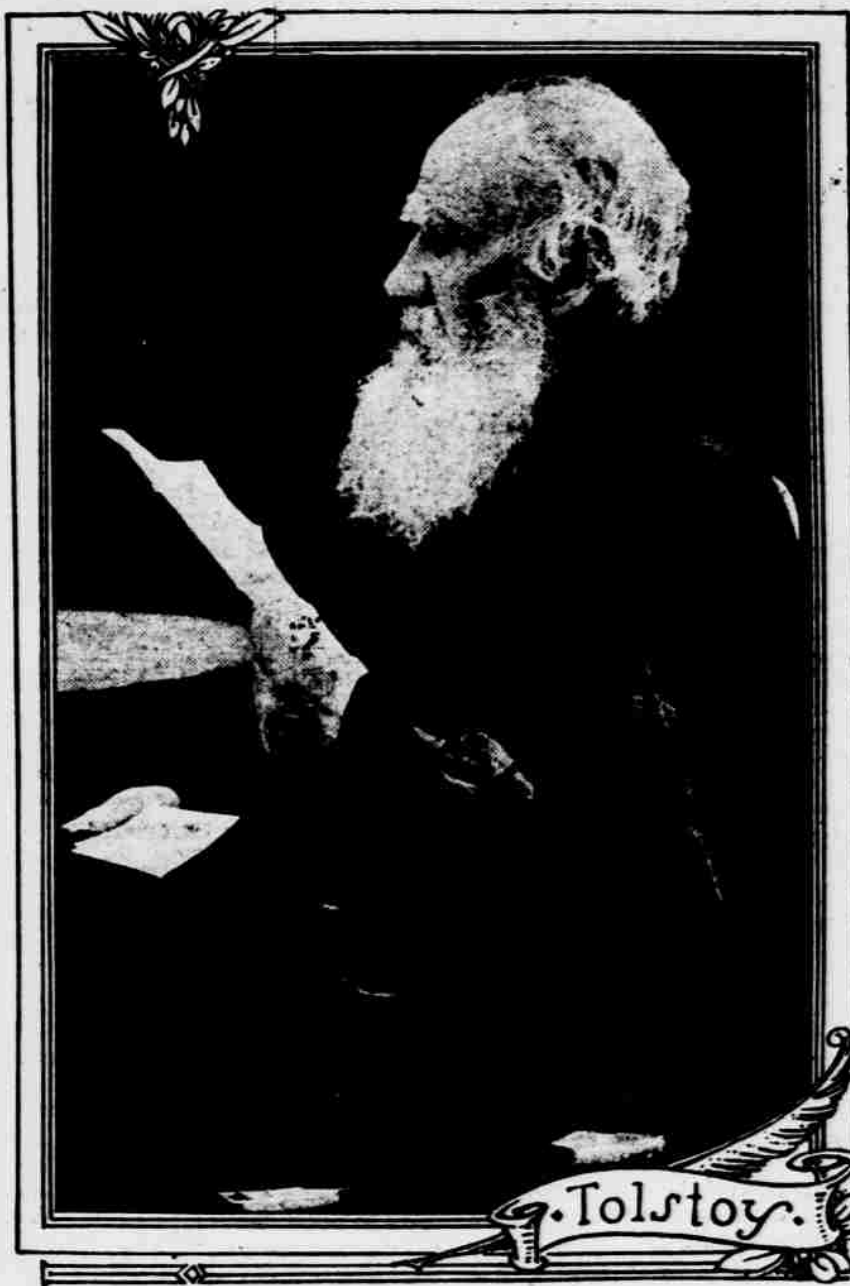
"Resist not evil by force. Do not reply to violence by violence; if they strike you, endure it; if they force you to work, work; if they wish to take from you what we regard as our own, give it up.

"Love all men alike, making no distinction of races and peoples; recognize neither kings nor kingdoms."

Russian View of War.

These ideas, constantly recurring throughout Tolstoy's work, from the earliest descriptions of war to the latest religious treatises, have become part and parcel of Russian thought.

In his book, *Tolstoy* (the second of the series, *Master Spirits of Literature*) George Rapall Noyes states: "This book alone [Sevastopol] would suf-



fice to establish its author's fame. Its effect on Russian public opinion has been considerable. War has come to be regarded in Russia, perhaps more than elsewhere, as blood, suffering and death, rather than as a glorious field of heroic combat." And elsewhere: "A change has indeed come over the whole style of the descriptions of war, and among those responsible for that change no single man was of more influence than Leo Tolstoy."

If Tolstoy Were Alive—

These utterances it will be well to ponder if we would understand the baffling behavior of the Bolsheviks. It is, of course, absurd to blame every misstep—some of which were undoubtedly attributable to German influence—to the teachings of Tolstoy, but it is no less absurd to ignore the power exerted by those teachings.

Consider the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, and the subsequent non-resistance to German force. Behind the acquiescence of the Bolsheviks is the thought, "if they strike you, endure it . . . if they wish to take from you what we regard as our own, give it up."

These are only a few of the random thoughts that arise from a perusal of the latest life of Tolstoy. Prof. Noyes has written a book which is stimulating, for he exposes at some length and with admirable clear-sightedness the principal ideas evolved by the great Russian, ideas which are now for the first time put into practice on a large scale. In no other book on Tolstoy do we find so complete a

statement of the ethical side of the man. Prof. Noyes has done well in bringing these questions before us at a time when all the world is attempting to understand the Russian mind.

What Tolstoy would have thought had he lived until the present day is a notion that constantly recurs in reading this volume. It would be curious to compare his mental processes with those of other great pacifists who have recently been forced to modify their ideas about warfare when confronted with the terrible problem now before us all. Would he agree with the great French pre-war pacifist, Paul Hyacinthe Loyson—now a volunteer Lieutenant in the French army—or would he support his uncompromising disciple, Scott Nearing, now facing trial for adhering to Tolstoyan principles and opposing the Government in its prosecution of the war?

Inspirer of Others.

The unceasing mental activity of the man is simply astounding. Read Tolstoy on education—take the following passage from Prof. Noyes's book: "The great sin of modern education is that it is founded on compulsion, being forced by the Government upon an unwilling people who do not desire it, but who do desire something quite different." Is not this (which is derived from Rousseau, of course) the very cornerstone of the educational experiments of John Dewey and Mme. Montessori? Tolstoy himself conducted a school on these principles. Read Tolstoy on art (and allow for all his absurd notions on the subject), and you will see where at least two distinguished literary men of the present age received inspira-

tion, for Bernard Shaw and Romain Rolland owe not a little to the Russian's theories on the necessity for an absolutely democratic art.

Naturally, Prof. Noyes's book is not exclusively devoted to the ideas of Tolstoy, but he has very wisely considered Tolstoy's life, his work and his ideas together.

There are few writers whose art is so intimately bound up with their life and extra-literary ideas as Leo Tolstoy's. From the very first he was constantly assailed by scruples of conscience. His recently published *Journal* sheds light on the subject which Prof. Noyes has utilized to the fullest extent.

Tolstoy's dual personality of moralist and artist was always at odds with itself, and the struggle is clearly perceived throughout this book.

Prof. Noyes's study is by no means the only one available in English. There are the authentic and incomplete Birukoff biography, the standard Aylmer Maude *Life of Tolstoy*, and Nathan Haskell Dole's *The Life of Count Lyof N. Tolstoi*, each of which is in its way indispensable. The Maude book is exhaustive, but by no means popular or readable as a whole; Mr. Dole's *Life* is valuable, but not particularly inspiring.

Prof. Noyes's *Tolstoy* enjoys the advantage of being readable, for it is well arranged; more than that, it is well written, and displays a knowledge of the subject which is ample for the scope of a brief work intended primarily for laymen.

TOLSTOY. By GEORGE RAPALL NOYES. Duffield & Co. \$1.50.